

Fish and Game Aggressively Managing Climate Change to Protect All Wildlife and Habitat

By John McCamman

The California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) is aggressively implementing a strategy to manage the impacts of global climate change on wildlife and habitat. In keeping with its mission, DFG is committed to reducing the effects of climate on the state's natural resources and helping all species to adapt to these changes, many of which are still largely unknown.

California's Wildlife Action Plan has been adopted and is being put into practice. It identifies climate change as one of four primary stressors affecting wildlife (along with growth and development, water management conflicts, and invasive species) and makes recommendations to incorporate climate change science in our restoration work. DFG recently hired Amber Pairis, Ph.D. as a climate change advisor to lead our work to reduce the impacts on species; Dr. Pairis comes to DFG from the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) in Washington, D.C., where she has served as the lead scientist on climate change and wildlife at the national level.

DFG has taken a leadership role among the state fish and wildlife agencies to begin to address the uncertainty associated with our changing climate through landscape-scale efforts that support managing robust populations and healthy habitats – the best way to ensure success in the face of uncertain future. There are many targeted efforts under way focused on climate change research, monitoring and other more specific actions.

We are evaluating the carbon impact of all departmental operations as part of the Climate Change Registry and as a Resources Agency-wide effort. The department is an active participant with the Resources Agency on the forestry, land-use and water, energy and transportation climate action team sub groups advising the Agency on factors relating to adaptation and mitigation for climate change effects on wildlife and natural resources.

Along with State Parks, CalFire, and other Resources Agency departments, we have an ongoing process in place with the Biodiversity Council to build a comprehensive library of published literature, popular articles, and other information on climate change effects that will be made available to the public. We've also developed complementary data and enhanced our close collaboration with sister state agencies to help inform decisions ranging from levee placement to park management to highway interchange locations.

Our staff represents wildlife interests on the climate action-working group of the Western Governor's Association and the Climate Change committee for AFWA.

Every region of the state is unique and will need its own blueprint for balancing the needs of people, fish, and wildlife. There is no "one size fits all" solution for fish and wildlife management or the implications of global climate change. As our water sources, weather patterns, vegetation, and critical food resources are altered by these impacts, management challenges continue to grow, but we will adapt well because of the strategy we are putting in place today.

While there is always more to do, because of the aforementioned reasons and so many more, we continue to ensure and uphold the Department of Fish and Game's mission to protect California's wildlife against the many challenges we face including those from global climate change.

John McCamman is the Acting Director for the California Department of Fish and Game.